



August 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

We are writing to urge you to include at least \$30,000,000 in COVID-19 relief legislation to provide critically needed funding for zoos and aquariums, including three in my home state of Connecticut, that are providing direct and ongoing support to federal agencies for the daily care and maintenance of: 1) animals rescued from the wild or confiscated at U.S. ports or borders for critical care, rehabilitation and/or reintroduction; 2) breeding populations of species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for conservation purposes; and 3) animals that are owned by the federal government.

Mystic Aquarium, Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo, and The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk are accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of accredited zoos, aquariums, nature centers, and science centers in the areas of animal care and welfare, conservation, education, science, and guest experience. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, these accredited zoos and aquariums face the unique challenge of needing to retain sufficient staff and supplies to care for their animals while they are closed to the public or operating at reduced capacity, like the facilities in Connecticut, to help minimize the spread of COVID-19. Normally, funding from gate receipts is used to support these facilities' participation in recovery and reintroduction efforts, eliminating or minimizing the need for federal support. However, with the significant loss of revenue, these facilities nationwide may soon not be able to fund the costs associated with these efforts.

The zoos and aquariums in Connecticut play a significant role in species conservation and are essential partners with federal agencies in these efforts. The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk is heavily involved in the AZA's Florida Reef Tract Rescue Project, in conjunction with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office of Protected Resources, and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The aquarium currently holds 36 corals of 13 different species as part of a refugium population to safeguard the genetic diversity of the Florida Reef Tract which is facing a devastating multi-year, disease-related mortality event that has resulted in massive die-offs of multiple coral species. The Maritime Aquarium's collection also includes seven ESA-listed species, and it is involved in emergency response efforts for animals covered under NOAA's marine mammal and sea turtle stranding networks, for which personnel regularly respond to reports of boat-struck sea turtles and distressed seals.

Mystic Aquarium is a founding member of the Northeast Region Stranding Network. The network consists of independent organizations dedicated to caring for sick and injured animals and learning more about the reasons they become stranded. Only groups and facilities authorized by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service are permitted to handle these animals, which are protected under federal law. The aquarium also spends significant resources annually to care for other ESA-listed species such as African Penguin, Green Sea Turtle, Panamanian

Golden Frog, and Desert Tortoise. Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo has been working with Red Wolves since the late 1980s and had their first pups born to the AZA Species Survival Program® in 1990. A total of 35 pups have been born at the zoo. Nineteen of those were moved for conservation programs at other institutions and some were returned to the wild. Since starting the program with Red Wolves at Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo they have worked with 51 individual animals. Their commitment to this endangered species also resulted in the construction of a facility for education and conservation named the Wolf Observation Learning Facility W.O.L.F. Additionally, the zoo, in conjunction with other institutions, received the North American Conservation award from the AZA for its cooperative work.

AZA estimates that at least \$5 million (\$2.5 million through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and \$2.5 million through NOAA) per month for the next six months is needed to maintain operations at these facilities across the country related to ESA-listed U.S. species, rescued and confiscated wildlife, and other federally-owned animals.

The COVID-19 pandemic is devastating both for public health and the economy. It also will negatively affect wildlife and species conservation efforts if we do not act now to provide support to the facilities upon which the federal government relies for these species' conservation, rescue/rehab, and recovery efforts. Therefore, we strongly urge you to include the necessary funding in COVID-19 relief legislation to allow these zoos and aquariums to keep these programs going while our nation recovers from the pandemic.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy

CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate